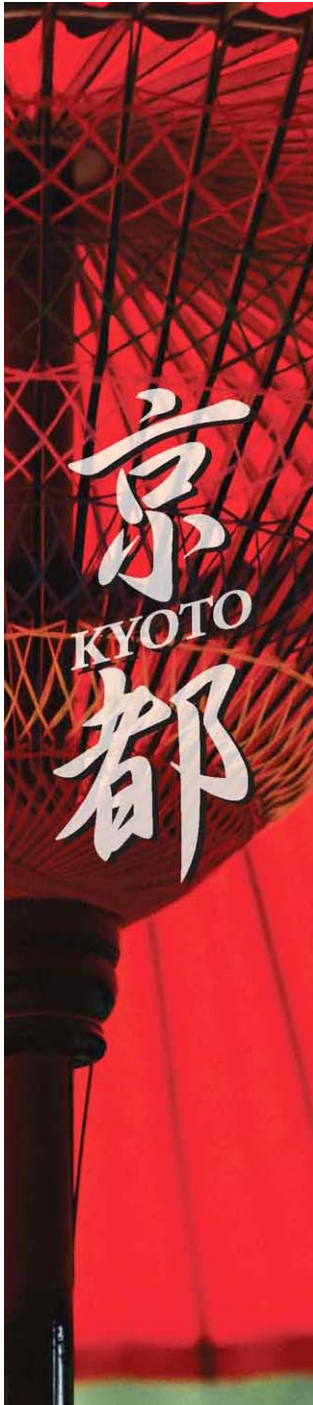


# The Renaissance of Kyoto Tourism

By JEF Editorial Section



**B**EGINNING in 794 when the Imperial capital was first located there, the Kyoto area has long flourished as the cultural and historical center of Japan. With 40 million tourists a year still making the pilgrimage today, Kyoto is one of the premier tourist destinations in Japan. It is by necessity, then, that the City of Kyoto has consistently led the country with its progressive approach to tourism policy and planning. As part of its current coordinated focus on further promoting tourism, Kyoto has introduced the City of Kyoto Tourism Promotion Plan, “Welcome to Kyoto Plan 21,” an expansive program designed to boost the number of visitors to the city to its target of 50 million a year.

## Plan to Restore Traditional Kyo-Machiyas

**W**HAT is it that drives millions of tourists to visit Kyoto? While the city is well known throughout the world for its historical buildings, temples and other ancient treasures, an increasing number of tourists are drawn to Kyoto in search of the unique cultural atmosphere created by the classic rows of houses which are still common in the city. *Kyo-machiyas* (traditional town houses in the city) are one of the unique tourist spots. Through promoting conservation and restoration of Kyo-machiyas in the community, neighborhoods are springing back to life, providing renewed cultural value and vitality that not only attracts greater numbers of tourists, but also improves the level of comfort for local residents.

Escaping most of the devastation wrought by World War II, the Kyoto cityscape today

still features a great number of the single or mezzanine-storied wooden residential and trade houses built between the Edo period and the beginning of the Showa period (1640-1920). Kyo-machiyas are also known as “eel’s bed” for their long, narrow layout, as houses were taxed according to the extent of the frontage. There is patio inside the house and removable sliding doors and partitions divide each room, so they can be used for a variety of purposes.

This unique architectural style is the product of centuries-old wisdom on the most comfortable lifestyle for Japan’s hot, humid climate. Data collected in 1998 indicates that roughly 28,000\* Kyo-machiyas are still in use today in areas urbanized at the end of the Meiji period. While a number have undergone renovation since they were first built and are now in use as shops, more than a few have been abandoned due to age and are being torn down and replaced with large commercial buildings and apartment complexes.

To curb the loss of these historic homes and focus on reviving the heart of the city by restoring the unique qualities found only in Kyoto, the City developed its Plan to Restore Traditional Kyo-machiyas. The plan is designed to protect Kyoto’s traditional neighborhoods, while at the same time putting the city’s architectural resources to practical use. The charm of Kyo-machiyas lies not only in the unique shape of these buildings, but also in the fact that Kyotoites today still live and work in these traditional homes and shops. An extremely valuable resource, the vitality and energy of day-to-day life in these neighborhoods must not be lost. Recognizing the



Salon & Gallery Ao and its interior



Yanagikoji (machiya-apartment)

\*Note : There are 28,000 Kyo-machiyas in the wards of Kamigyo, Nakagyo, Shimogyo, and part of Higashiyama. The total number of Kyo-machiyas in the entire city of Kyoto is even larger.



importance of the preservation and restoration of these structures, the plan incorporates a centralized and integrated approach that involves a broad spectrum of city residents – the actual residents living in traditional Kyo-machiyas, civic groups, architectural experts and local private businesses. Machiya Club is a group formed by local residents to assist in the process of renting out empty Kyo-machiyas in the Nishijin district to people who are interested in living in this type of house. The City of Kyoto recently introduced a new system for the restoration and rental of Kyo-machiyas in an attempt to subsidize the expense involved in repairing empty Kyo-machiyas and advertising so that empty houses can be rented out. Kyo-machiyas renovated and operating as restaurants and shops are also extremely popular and a useful tool in encouraging local entrepreneurship. The Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport is also reviewing a potential new method for financing restoration that would encourage

investors to put up the funds for the restoration of Kyo-machiyas with the incentive of strong yields in real estate securities. Special consideration has also been given to areas designated as scenic, historical neighborhoods. Exceptions to the standard building codes allow for restoration that preserves the integrity of a building façade, as long as the primary building codes are satisfied. Thanks to the efforts of local residents, special building codes and regulations designed to protect neighborhoods comprising traditional wooden structures are currently being developed. A neighborhood plan for the southern Gion district prohibits the introduction of cabarets and similar establishments within the district. The City of Kyoto is committed to measures to preserve the refined scenic, world-renowned neighborhoods of Kyoto. **J.S**

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#### Dissemination of Information

IT-based information to tourists  
(multiple language website)  
Creation of a broad network of vendors and customers and information services  
(Tourist information offices capable of handling multiple languages)  
Tourism promotion and campaigns in strategic locations in Asia

### City of Kyoto Tourism Promotion Plan (excerpts taken from the Welcome to Kyoto Plan 21)

#### Experience Kyoto

Introducing a variety of themed city walking courses  
Maintenance of pedestrian spaces  
(Barrier Free Movement; maintaining a scenic, litter-free cityscape)

Enhancing public transportation services  
(city buses, subways)  
Restoring traditional Kyo-machiyas and enhancing the beauty of the cityscape  
Illumination of temples, walkways, rivers and other features to create a new natural and poetic Kyoto

Adding after dark cultural events like concerts; late opening of museums and parks.  
Enhancing the Experience Kyoto Program  
(culture, art, traditional crafts)  
Experience Kyo-machiya Program  
City College  
Creating an environment along the Kamogawa  
(the main river running through the city) where tourists and residents can relax and enjoy themselves